



THE BOYS



OF SUMMER





LED BY COLORFUL COACH JOHN 'HI' SIMMONS, THE 1954 MISSOURI TIGERS BASEBALL TEAM WON THE COLLEGE WORLD SERIES IN OMAHA, NEB., TO CAPTURE THE FIRST TEAM NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP IN MIZZOU HISTORY. AS THE SQUAD'S LIVING MEMBERS CELEBRATE THE 60TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ACHIEVEMENT JUNE 16, 2014, THE MEMORIES ARE STILL GLORIOUS. STORY BY MARCUS WILKINS



everything was cool. That's the thing about 1954.

The United States was hitting its groove like a sharply rapped double to the wall in left center. Elvis Presley. Ella Fitzgerald. Sock hops and powder blue Chevy convertibles. For college students, World War II was a childhood memory, Vietnam was geographically unknown, and if you were a baseball player, it was your heyday — Joe DiMaggio wed Marilyn Monroe, for goodness' sake.

In Columbia, a young and confident Missouri Tigers baseball team played on Rollins Field betwixt the football bleachers and the slope ascending to Crowder Hall. During those games on the corner of Maryland (now Tiger) Avenue and Rollins Road, the breeze would waft cinders used to surface a nearby walkway onto the diamond.

Powered by a .311 team batting average and a 2.30 team earned run average, and led by legendary Coach John "Hi" Simmons, Mizzou stormed through the Big Seven Conference with an 11-1 record. The Tigers went on to win the College World Series in Omaha, Neb., dropping but one tournament game against Rollins College of Winter Park, Fla., the same team Mizzou would beat in the rematch final June 16, 1954.

It was the University of Missouri's first NCAA championship in a team sport. Loaded with sophomores and juniors, and perhaps reflective of the group's brash personality, the younger Tigers believed they might win another pair of titles before graduating. As it stands, the 1954 baseball team and the 1965 indoor track team are MU's only national championship squads.

The Tigers earned walnut-and-bronze plaques for their effort, but as Mizzou celebrates the feat's 60th anniversary in 2014, the collective memories remain the teams' most cherished keepsakes.

'HI' TIMES

Athletic Director Don Faurot, BS Ag '25, MA '27, promoted Simmons from freshman football coach and scout to head baseball coach in 1937. He immediately established his reputation as a sharp baseball mind and a no-nonsense motivator, but his colorful vocabulary was equally well-known.

"He'd always call you 'boy,' and if he came out to the mound and you weren't doing well, I couldn't repeat what he said," says pitcher Ed Cook, BS ME '57. "He was a nuts-and-bolts type of coach. He taught fundamentals, and he never let you read your own press clippings."

Cook grew up in Granite City, Ill., an appropriate hometown for one of the rocks of the Mizzou pitching staff. When Faurot recruited the lefty in 1952, the Don boasted of Simmons' Tigers who had finished second in the College World Series.

"[Faurot] said, 'You don't want to go to Illinois. We've got this great '52 team, and if you want notoriety, you should go to Mizzou,'" Cook says. "Plus we've got a great relief pitcher, Bert Beckmann," and my dad asked, 'What's a relief pitcher?' It was a different game back then."

By 1954, Beckmann, BS Ed '55, M Ed '68, (Overland, Mo.) was a starting pitcher, and he and Emil Kammer, BS BA '56, (Normandy, Mo.) joined Cook to pitch the lion's share of Tigers innings. The fourth pitcher, a feisty sophomore from Shelbyville, Mo., named Norm Stewart, BS Ed '56, M Ed '60, nearly quit after a horrendous start against Oklahoma A&M (now Oklahoma State).

"I don't think I even completed an inning that day," Stewart says. "Our team bus driver was Bob Finley, the mayor of Mexico, Mo. I was so mad I hit the side of his bus with my cleats, and then I had *him* mad at me."

Mizzou's pitching was so indomitable that Stewart recalls an episode in the bullpen when

+ TEAM PHOTO,
FRONT ROW: Bob Musgrave, George Gleason, Todd Sickel, Bob Schoonmaker, Dick Dickinson, Jim Doerr, Bert Beckmann
SECOND ROW: Ed Cook, Bob Bauman, Jack Gabler, Lloyd Elmore, Kent Henson, Lee Roy Wynn, Sam Sayers
BACK ROW: Coach John Simmons, Buddy Cox, Jerry Schoonmaker, Norm Stewart, Emil Kammer, Gene Gastineau, Herb Morgan, Doc Ollie DeVictor



'I WAS THE ONLY MARRIED PLAYER ON THE TEAM,' SAYS DICKINSON. 'I MADE SURE EVERYONE CAME TO PRACTICE AND NO ONE SCREWED AROUND. I FELT PRETTY GOOD ABOUT OUR POTENTIAL, BUT I HAD NO IDEA WE WERE GOING TO BE NATIONAL CHAMPIONS.'

† Missouri team captain Dick Dickinson, BJ '54, and Coach John "Hi" Simmons receive the 1954 NCAA Baseball Championship trophy from NCAA Coaches Association President Kyle Anderson.

he convinced team cutup Bob Musgrave, BJ '56, (Columbia) to do a handstand while playing right field against the floundering Colorado opposition.

The champs fondly remember road trips, especially stops at the Brookville (Kan.) Hotel endorsed in the '50s by famed restaurant critic Duncan Hines. Simmons was thrifty, and he knew all the good, inexpensive eateries on the road.

"It was all-you-can-eat fried chicken, and let me tell you," says left fielder Jim Doerr, BS CiE '55.

"The Brookville lost money on us."

Doerr (St. Louis) played the outfield with Jerry Schoonmaker (Lebanon, Mo.), Mizzou's regular-season offensive leader with nine home runs and a .425 batting average. The only 1954 Tiger to go on to Major League Baseball, Schoonmaker, BS BA '57, spent two seasons with the Washington Senators where he played alongside Hall-of-Famer Harmon Killebrew. The pay was peanuts, so Schoonmaker was working an offseason construction job when



an accident blinded him in one eye. His hitting was never the same.

His older brother, Bob Schoonmaker, BS BA '54, batted .307 and played first base. The late Bob Schoonmaker's claim to fame was an appearance with his wife on the TV show *Queen for a Day* immediately following the Tigers' World Series victory. The newlyweds were so rushed to get to the filming that Omaha police escorted Schoonmaker directly from the field to the airport.

Outfielder Lee Roy Wynn's dramatic moment occurred behind the scenes. Simmons announced Wynn would start in the World Series against top-seeded Michigan State. The night before the game at the hotel, Wynn (Overland, Mo.) busted his glasses wrestling with Mizzou football fullback and pitcher Bob Bauman. Rather than tell Coach and miss his chance, Wynn played the game with one lens and had a critical role in Mizzou's 4-3 victory. Wynn waited until the Tigers had been crowned before he confessed to Simmons.

"My fear was that at some point during the game I would stick my finger through the frame to itch my eye and give myself away," says Wynn, BS Ed '56. "Afterward, I went into Hi's office and told him about it. He turned white as a ghost."

Team captain Dick Dickinson, BJ '54, helped keep Coach Simmons' heart rate in check that season by reining in the team "clowns." Nicknamed "Scooter" after New York Yankees shortstop Phil "Scooter" Rizutto, the senior shortstop went on to play for a U.S. Army team in Fort Carson, Colo., where he befriended famed Yankees outfielder and manager Billy Martin.

"I was the only married player on the [Missouri] team," Dickinson says. "I made sure everyone came to practice and no one screwed around. I felt pretty good about our potential, but I had no idea we were going to be national champions."



CHAMPIONSHIP CREDENTIALS

The Missouri Tigers went 5-1 in the 1954 College World Series, beating Lafayette, Massachusetts, Oklahoma A&M, Michigan State and splitting with Rollins. Thanks in part to a restful rainout before the final (the team passed time at a local theater watching Jimmy Stewart in *The Glenn Miller Story*), Cook's dominant, six-hit pitching performance made the final somewhat anticlimactic.

Most players remember the postgame celebration as relatively subdued. There wasn't a pitchers-mound dog pile or an ice water baptism for Simmons. Perhaps it was the team's supreme confidence and high expectations. Or maybe it



was because the players, already having forfeited weeks of summer vacation, were itching to go. The newly christened champs embraced, gathered up belongings and went their separate ways.

The following season, Simmons showed off his much more substantial trophy: a new car. The boys admired Coach's automotive upgrade, and after a typical Simmons upbraiding in 1955, Kammer recalls feeling particularly bold.

"Stewart and I were running in the outfield, and I said to Norm, 'That son of a [gun] would still be driving his old piece of [junk] if it wasn't for us,'" says Kammer with a laugh.

Despite the banter and berating, Simmons was beloved. To a man, the Tigers credit "Coach Hi" for the team's ultimate success. Simmons retired in 1973 with a 481-294-3 career record, 11 conference championships and six World Series trips. He died Jan. 12, 1995, at 89.

Also gone are Jesse "Buddy" Cox, BS BA '55; Bob Musgrave; George Gleason, BS BA '55; Bob Schoonmaker; Bob Bauman and Eldon "Herb" Morgan, BS BA '57. The St. Louis-area alumni annually reunite at McGurk's Irish Pub to relive the glory days. The 60th anniversary festivities had not yet been orchestrated at press time.

"In 1954, we just jelled as a team," Doerr says. "I never thought about the possibility of losing. People at my church will see my ring and ask about it. As time goes on, the story grows. I guess it was just the right place at the right time." **M**

↑ MEMORIES AT MEMORIAL STADIUM

Mizzou honored the 1954 Tigers at Faurt Field Sept. 4, 2004, before the football Tigers beat Arkansas State, 52-20. The baseball team received NCAA championship rings.

FIRST ROW, FROM

LEFT: Todd Sickel, Bert Beckmann, Dick Dickinson, Buddy Cox, Lee Roy Wynn

SECOND ROW:

Bob Bauman, George Gleason, Lloyd Elmore, Emil Kammer, Bob Musgrave, Ed Cook

THIRD ROW:

Jerry Schoonmaker, Norm Stewart, Jack Gabler, Jim Doerr, Sam Sayers